Distress Beacon, Registration: 08674

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by orphan_account

Summary

Will Graham wakes up from cryonic stasis alongside Hannibal to discover that are the only survivors of a mysterious event that wiped out the entire population of a high security prisoner transport ship. Stranded and alone, Will starts to see things that can't be real. His only comfort: He is trapped with the one friend who can keep him sane.

Notes

A quick note: Please pay heed to the fact I haven't used archive warnings, or really tagged for any warnings either. This is NOT because there is nothing that could be in any way triggering or disturbing in this fanfic. There is plenty. That said, I don't think it goes very much beyond the standard set by the Hannibal canon.

If anyone wants to read this fic but is worried about anything specific it might contain, please feel free to drop me a message in a comment or in an ask at my Tumblr, I'm more than happy to give spoileriffic warnings to anyone who wants them, I just don't want to head the fic with them.

Thanks to my wonderful Holmesbody for helping me through the writing of this and for the co-conceiving of the idea in that dark corner booth at the pub down the street. You're the best.

Chapter 1

The last thing he can remember thinking, is that climbing into the cryonic stasis tube is a bit like climbing into a coffin. It is small, only marginally padded, and once it locks, you're as good as dead.

In a coffin-sized cylinder of frozen metal and nitrogen gas, Will Graham is slowly brought back to life.

Surrounded by cold, gleaming whiteness, he is left alone with his thoughts and the knowledge that his heart only recently started beating again after a long period on hiatus. It is not his first time coming out of stasis, but it feels the same each time. He swallows his growing panic and he swallows his voice, wanting to cry for help.

He knows better, but its like he has woken up from a long sleep to find he's been buried alive.

*

The cryonic tubes - enough of them for the entire crew of the ship - line the wall of the medical bay, floor to ceiling. Each one is about a foot and a half tall and wide, and six and a half feet long. They are slotted in one next to the other in aisles and columns, so that when they are all full the wall of the medical bay is a dormant hive of frozen bodies.

Currently, only a single cryonic tube is occupied, labelled 'Graham, W.' and positioned somewhere over in the far corner of the bay, about knee hight.

*

When internal body temperature drops below twenty-seven degrees centigrade, the human body will lose consciousness.

Will is currently conscious, so he knows he's approaching a stable, optimum internal temperature. The process is entirely automated. When his body reaches about thirty-seven degrees, the cryonic tube will scan him, make sure he's alive and not brain dead, then trigger the release valve and the hatch door to open, then slide the little bed inside the tube out into the open.

The process is silent, and always seems to take longer than it did the last time. Shivering, Will waits, trying not to panic. Any moment, the hatch will release, slide open, and he'll be able to climb out. He stares at the white, smooth tile above him and concentrates on breathing in and out. Taps his fingers next to his thigh.

Nothing happens.

He is still cold, it takes a while to shake of the chill that lingers after a long stint in cryo; but the hatch should have released by now. Restless, Will shifts in the narrow tube, lifting up his

head to try and look down his body to the end of the hatch. He can't see much, but it's definitely still locked.

With difficulty, he raises his arms over his head. There isn't much elbow room, but he manages, uncomfortably bracing himself against the far end of the tube, and kick's at the hatch door. The sound of his bare foot connecting with metal is nothing more than a dull slap, and it does nothing to budge the hatch. He tries again, kicking hard at the door.

"HELLO?" he shouts, hoping the ship's doctor is in the med-bay right now. His voice is hoarse with disuse, and he clears his throat and tries again. "HELLO? IS ANYONE OUT THERE?"

No one hears him, no one helps. His voice is loud in the tiny tube, ringing in his own ears. He kicks again at the hatch door, and again and again and again, shouting the whole time.

He stops only when his feet are stinging and hot and his shouts are dry and painful. He goes still, and panics internally. His heart is pounding so loudly that Will almost thinks he can hear it echoing in his little chamber. His breathing is coming fast and harsh, but he knows he's losing air; he can feel his vision going grey at the edges. Forcefully, he tries to breath slower, but it is little use while he's still in this state of panic.

Time passes. Will can't tell how long. He thinks he possibly loses consciousness, just for a moment, on the tail end of his hyperventilation. He's just died, he thinks, suspended in death in ice and nitrogen, and been brought back to life only to die again, properly this time.

Suddenly, there is a gust of cool air, and the hatch door swings open with a sigh as it de-pressurises. Someone pulls his little bed out, and suddenly Will is lying naked in the med-bay, blinking at the overhead light. Dr. Lecter is looking down at him.

Will scrambles to sit up, feeling dizzy the moment he does. He groans, and tilts forward, catching himself with a grip on his narrow suspended bed.

"Slowly, Mr. Graham," Hannibal says, and moves around the bed to stand in front of Will. He's holding a flimsy hospital robe, which he holds out for Will to take. It does little to warm him, but he wraps it around his body gratefully, still shivering with the lingering effect of cryo.

"Where's the med-bay doctor?" Will asks, looking up at Hannibal, who is also, surprisingly, wearing hospital robes, although warmer looking ones than Will's.

"I don't know," he replies. "Mr. Graham, I am afraid… Something has happened on the ship."

Will looks around. The med bay looks normal, but aside from Will and Hannibal, empty. It is very quiet. "What? What has happened?"

"I also do not know that," Hannibal says. "I can tell you that it would appear the crew has gone."

"So we've docked, then?" Will asks. He rubs his hands over his arms, trying to bring warmth to his body. Now that he thinks about it, it is *very* quiet on the ship, quieter than he's ever heard it before.

Hannibal shakes his head, frowning. "That is not the case."

"So, what are you saying?" Will says. Panic is suddenly welling up inside him again. He slides off the suspended bed to stand and walks around the med-bay. There is a wide window on the far wall, and outside of it Will can see only the vast emptiness of space. So they're not in a docking bay, that's for sure. "There's no one else on the ship?"

"Not as far as I can ascertain," Hannibal replies, as Will moves over to the med-bay door. It slides open with a soft noise as he approaches it, and Will stares out at the empty corridor. His heart is racing again in his chest.

Will braces himself against the med-bay door, shivering in his flimsy hospital gown, and listens. He can hear the ships engine whirring several floors down in engineering, and nothing else.

"The prisoners?" he asks Hannibal, his voice sounding far away to his own ears.

He doesn't really hear Dr. Lecter's answer over the thrumming of blood pulsing through his own body, but it knows it. Gone. Gone. Gone. Ignoring Hannibal behind him, Will rushes out into the corridor, running down the ship. His bare feet slap against the ground, the only sound, echoing through the walls. He passes no one.

At the end of the corridor, Will reaches the recreation room. He doesn't like the rec room, but there's always people in there. As he approaches, the door sighs open.

It's empty.

Will steps inside, braces his back against the wall by the door. His vision is going spotty again. The room is empty, every line of chairs, every seat at every small table. Will's heart pounds in his chest. It's true. The crews gone. Everyone is gone.

Will slides down the wall. His vision fades out.

*

Where's Jack?

Will can't breath. His fingers tighten on the gun, twitch.

Where's Jack? We've finally got him.

But it's all going wrong. Will is keeping the firearm out of sight, but the air is suddenly suffocating. People are talking all around him, idle chatter, but it's all just a harsh buzzing noise inside his head. But-

But where's Jack? He needs to catch Jack's eye. Trying for casual, Will looks around, tries to spot Crawford amongst the crowd of people. He can still feel the dark-haired girl's eyes burning into him, and catches her fixed stare again as he turns back around. She seems to have frozen in place, pausing in her conversation with the other young woman, who looks so similar, so confused now. Will can hear her over the buzzing of the room:

"Abigail? Abigail, you okay?"

Again, Abigail's eyes flash to the man seated near her - he's sprawled a few chairs over, clearly putting careful effort into looking relaxed, but Will can see the tenseness in his jaw, in the twitch of his eyes - then back to Will, meaningfully.

Where the hell is Jack? There's no doubt in Will's mind, even though its only been a few seconds of eye contact with this girl, Abigail, that they've finally found the Shrike. His fingers twitch again on his gun; he glances across at the man, the Shrike. *Only for a second - Will looks away as quickly as he looks over, still aiming to look like just another civilian on the ship - but he can tell that the Shrike caught him looking. Can tell from the way he stiffens out of the corner of his eye that he knows he's been found out.*

There's Jack. He's standing over by the coffee machine, half turned away from Will. He's behind the man, only a few feet away. If Will could just get his attention, Jack could have the cuffs out, apprehend him before he even knows what's happening.

Drawing in a deep breath, Will glances back at Abigail, who's now talking to the other girl again, trying to laugh off the momentary pause. Nonetheless, she again makes eye contact with Will, tightens her lips a little, nods almost imperceptibly. Will ducks his head in return, looks back over at Crawford, who's still turned away...

That small nod seems to act like a gunshot, firing the Shrike into action. All of a sudden, he is behind Abigail - so fast that Will didn't even see him move - and has a knife pulled out, held to her throat. Abigail gasps, freezing up. The girl she was talking to screams, and the all chatter in the room stops. For Will, time seems to slow to a crawl. He pulls out his gun, points it at the Shrike, opens his mouth to yell, "FREEZE!"

He doesn't get the word out. The Shrike presses his knife harder against Abigail's throat, and a shining drop of blood slides down her neck: Will pulls the trigger on the gun.

The bullet goes right through the Shrike's head, and he drops to the floor. The knife drops to the floor - Abigail follows, clutching her hands to her throat. Blood is gushing through her fingers, and she is gasping in breaths she can't quite make. Will is at her side in moments, and so is Crawford, his hand coming down on Will's shoulder...

Then it happens again. The knife is on Abigail's throat again, and Will is watching for the second time: Except this time he knows what happens. He sees the blood pour from her throat before it surfaces, sees his bullet go through Hobb's - he knows his name this time; Garret Jacob Hobbs - forehead. More than that, he sees the upcoming months, all the hours spent by Abigail's bedside as she lies comatose in the hospital, all the turmoil of those few seconds where everything had clicked together, and he'd known who the Shrike was, what he

did, what he got his own daughter to do, how - just for a moment - he had become Hobbs. How that man had lived inside him for months after, a sickness within his humanity.

He knows he's going to shoot Hobbs again. The suffocating air, the idle chatter that fills up the rec hall - it's white noise. Will jumps from his seat, pulls his gun out and points it at Hobbs.

He pulls the trigger, and the pretty blonde technician he sat next to in the mess the other night crumples to the floor, dead.

Will comes back to himself. He's choking on his own breaths, his head is palpitating wildly, bile is rising up in his throat, tears in his eyes. He is shaking in a chair in the rec hall, motionless. The pretty blonde is still chatting to her friend. She glances over at him, smiles.

Dashing out of the room, Will finds himself bent over in the corridor, just trying to draw air into his lungs. Everything is black.

*

"Will, I need you to listen to my voice."

There's a compressing weight pushing in on Will's chest, and he can't breath. He's gasping in fast, shallow breaths. He knows he's hyperventilating, knows he needs to slow his breathing, needs to relax, but he can't. The world is dark at the edges, as if the blackness of space is slowly eating away at everything except the small part of the universe directly in his line of sight. The chest of Hannibal's hospital gown.

"You need to breath. Breath with me, Will."

Hannibal is taking deep, slow breaths. His hands are clutching Will's shoulders. He tries to copy the steady in and out of Hannibal's breathing, but feels even more light-headed.

"Slower, Will," Hannibal urges.

"I need to sit down," mutters Will. Even as he speaks, his knees are giving out, he's sliding down the wall to the floor. Hannibal follows, down onto his knees, his hands still firmly holding Will upright.

"Better?"

"Mm." Will lets his head hang forward. He feels steadier, slumped against the wall. The blackness creeping in from the corner of his eyes starts to recede. Hannibal is wearing slippers.

"Okay, now breath."

Will does. It comes easily.

*

The cold of cryonic stasis lingering inside him, Will shivers his way after Hannibal, who leads him through the gleaming silver rabbit warren halls of the ship. He talks the whole time, but not about anything important. Not about why theirs are the only paws padding on the cold floors. Will is still barefoot.

"You must be freezing," Hannibal says. "We'll find something warm for you to drink." Hannibal pauses, glances Will up and down. "And some socks."

"The- the temperature reg- regulation isn't on." Will is surprised to hear his teeth chattering around his words.

"It is," replies Hannibal. "It is part of the basic life support on the ship. If it were not functioning at all, neither of us would be here. It's running on the most efficient setting, however, which I will admit is rather brisk."

Will looks Hannibal over, and notes that yes, he's looking pretty chilled as well. He's been out of cryo longer than Will and is wearing a warmer looking robe, and slippers, so he's not quite the blue-tinged popsicle Will assumes he is right now. Nonetheless he can see the goosebumps on Hannibal's exposed forearms and calves, and the way he's tugging the gown tightly around his body. It makes Will feel… slightly warmer, to know that they're in the same boat.

"We're on basic life-support?"

"Yes." They turn a corner, and the doors to the mess hall slide open. Will has never seen the room empty before - it's usually packed at meal times with the entirety of the non-inmate portion of the crew, and Will is usually one of the first to leave once he's eaten. He takes a seat on the long bench, right near the end of the massive table, and feels tiny. Hannibal puts a hand on his shoulder, encouraging him to stay in place. "Wait here," he says and moves off, away to the food and drink station.

Will sits and waits, the thin fibres of his hospital gown not putting much between the cold metal of his seat and his rear. He rubs his hands over his arms ineffectually.

After a couple of short minutes, Hannibal is back and holding out a mug of hot chocolate, which Will takes gratefully.

"I'm afraid it's just from the machine," Hannibal says, sounding genuinely regretful, but Will doesn't care: The vaguely chocolate flavoured, slightly burnt milk is the sweetest, warmest thing he's ever tasted in this moment, and it warms him down to his toes. Hannibal sits down on the corner of the table, body angled towards Will. "Now," he says.

"You have good news and bad news?"

Hannibal smiles wryly. "A little more of the latter, I'm afraid. But which would you like first?"

"Good news, I suppose," Will sighs, and takes another sip of hot chocolate.

"We are alive."

"That's it?"

"And we shall continue to be alive into the foreseeable future."

There's a long pause, during which Will continues to take small sips of his drink, watching Hannibal, who eventually continues:

"The bad news is entirely speculation, unfortunately, and I do not know much more than you. I came out of cryo, much like you did, about two hours ago - I suspended myself voluntarily during the trip also. I was set to come out automatically when we were due for docking, which I assume is why I woke up. However, in that time, we seem to have drifted significantly off course."

"And the crew is gone."

"Yes, and the crew is gone. The prisoner decks are empty also, I checked. I also visited the bridge, and inspected the ship's computers. They have all been wiped of all records, and reduced to their basic functionality. Electricity, life support, core programming. No navigation equipment, no A.I., no direct communications."

Will has finished his hot chocolate, and is starting to feel the familiar chill again.

"What else?"

"Elsewise, I remembered I was not the only one suspended, and came to find you. And here we are."

"Ah." Will suspects he's going to be hyperventilating again before long. "So, what do we do?"

"Well, there is one other piece of good news. The ship still has the capacity to send out a distress beacon, so when another ship passes within range, we will be rescued."

The problem with that, they both know, is that if there is one thing space is, its big. It could be a long time before another ship comes out this way, especially having drifted off course. The quadrant the high security prison station was being established was not a high traffic area, nor did it border on one in any direction, for obvious reasons. When it is discovered that this ship and its prisoners never reached their destination there will be searches, yes. But space, space is extremely, unfathomably big. And drifting is the fastest way to become lost.

Will gets to his feet, both hands around the styrene cup, and walks over to the far end of the mess hall, to look out the porthole. He sees nothing but stars. He remembers watching films when he was younger, and half expects to see one of the monstrous alien ships from one of the B-grade ones crawl into view, flanking them, implausibly rusted and blood red.

Nothing is there, nothing at all.

"What could have done this?" he asks Hannibal. "Are we next?"

"This ship," Hannibal replies, "housed many of the worst murderers and criminals found on Earth or our colonies. You know that, Will. Many of them were severely psychotically deranged. I have spoken to quite a few, myself, and I assure you, I do not doubt that there were many who, should they have escaped confinement, would not have hesitated to kill every person on this ship. We shall have to assume that that is the case. The methodology, we may never know. Where all the bodies have gone, I for one, would *rather not* know."

Will turned away from the window, facing Hannibal again, eyes wide. He was still shaking with cold, but could feel fear running icy through his veins also as the weight of their reality sunk into him. "So whoever it was," he asks, "they're still on the ship?"

"We will search for them, but I dare say we will find no-one," Hannibal answers. "There is one other piece of information, one that somewhat straddles the good news/bad news divide: The only escape shuttle is gone."

Chapter 2

"You don't want to be here?"

"Not really." Will glances up at Dr. Lecter, his eyes darting over the other man's shoulders, then looks back down at his own hands.

Lecter leans forward. Will knows he's taking note of his seemingly nervous state, and consciously stops fiddling his fingers, setting his hands firmly on his knees.

"Many people find close scrutiny uncomfortable. Are you one of them?" Lecter asks.

"I just don't think this is going to work."

"Well that is something we can worry about later, don't you think?" Lecter looks questioningly across at him, and Will shrugs a shoulder agreeably, still avoiding eye contact. "For now, would you like to tell me what happened?"

"I had a panic attack," he answers with a sigh.

"What do you think brought it on?" Lecter's manner is very... reasonable, Will thinks. He's been to therapists countless times before - pressured every time, just like this - and they always had a sense of calmness to them. But Lecter's particular brand of serenity seems like it could *work, Will thinks. Maybe. "By account, you appeared to be perfectly relaxed up until the moment you couldn't breath."*

"What kind of psychiatrist elects *to work on a prisoner transport ship rather than open a practice back on Earth?"*

Lecter quirks a brow at the deflection. "I am not the topic of discussion, Mr. Graham."

"Do people get more fascinatingly crazy when they're locked up with a bunch of criminals and no escape for months on end?"

"Is that the source of your anxiety?" Lecter counters.

Will considers it for a moment: Now he thinks about it, he's not sure. It's not a comfortable situation, that's for sure. Nevertheless… "No. I'm used to this. I was an FBI profiler."

Lecter actually looks interested at that, his body language shifting slightly, tilting his head to the side curiously. "Really?" He says, then smiles. "This is why you do not think therapy is of any use on you, I would assume."

Will quirks the corner of his lip up. "More or less. I can… see behind the curtain."

"You know I am not a magician, Mr. Graham," Lecter points out. "I am just here to talk with you. To be objective."

"I understand that." Will rubs his temples, closes his eyes. He knows he's not going to get anything out of this hour if he just argues every point. "I quit the FBI after I killed someone. It was… messing with my head for a while." He pauses, considering his words. "It happened on a space station. In… In a rec room, like the one on board."

"Where you had the panic attack?" Lecter clarifies. Will nods.

"Yeah. I left the FBI to get away from these memories. It was working."

It had been, too. Will knows that those few weeks after he shot Garrett Jacob Hobbs in the head - weeks he spent by Abigail's bedside, staring at the clean bandages that hid the gash in her throat from his sight: The gash that reminded him he hadn't pulled the trigger fast enough *- were some of the worst weeks of his life. He had felt unbalanced, unable to find any stability in his own mind, in his work. It was all just a reminder of how Hobbs had crumpled to the floor, levelled by* his *own action. How* justified *it felt. How Abigail was alone, now, because of him. But when he left the bureau, everything had settled. Slowly at first, but eventually. By the time he had signed up for this (strictly academic) assignment, he had been feeling entirely himself.*

"Did you anticipate that this might be a problem before you took the position on this ship?" Lecter asks.

"No, not at all. I didn't think--" Pausing, Will takes a deep breath through his nose. "No. I mean, I'm just here studying how the new prison station affects the mental state of the inmates. I saw no reason why space-travel wouldn't be fine. I mean, when I was a kid I was going between the Luna-dock and Earth all the time. I've been flying my whole life."

"Space flight is unique in many ways in how it affects the mind," Lecter says, leaning back in his chair a little as he speaks. "It is not like any sort of transport or containment on Earth, where there is always survivable atmosphere on the other side of the wall. It is also time consuming, unlike 'porting, which, for the vast majority of the population, is the only equivalent form of transport in terms of emotional and existential crisis."

"I've always been fine with it," Will replies with a shrug of the shoulder.

"Nonetheless, it is natural for your sub-conscious mind to associate a memory you feel is inescapable with a related, and equally inescapable location."

They're both quiet for a moment: Lecter seems to be waiting neutrally for Will to reply to his pontification. Will has little interest in doing so.

Eventually he responds with, "So is that why you choose to work aboard a spaceship then? The, uh," - he pauses, laughing softly - "'emotional and existential crisis'?"

"That, yes, and the unique opportunities," Lecter answers with a light chuckle of his own; then sobers. "May I make a recommendation?"

"Hm?"

"There is no need for your mind to go through undue stress." Lecter stands up, walking away from the chairs and starts looking through the drawers on his desk, quickly locating and pulling out a data-tablet. He pulls up a document on the screen, and starts inputting text. "The medical bay is equipped with emergency cryonic beds for each crew member. With my recommendation, you would be able to enter suspended animation until we arrive on board the main station, and you could continue with your study then."

Will hesitates. He likes the idea, but he's here to do a job. "I am not just observing the inmates on the new station. I'm observing them on the journey as well."

"I understand," Lecter says, nodding. "And it is entirely up to you. But your research is less important than your mental health, Will. Would you at least consider my suggestion?"

"... I'll consider it." Will rubs his hand over the fabric of his trousers, thinking. "Yeah."

*

Will considers the ceiling with detached interest. The light that filters down from above has taken on the warm, artificial glow of mid-afternoon sunlight, but nonetheless, he's trying to sleep. Unsuccessfully, so far. He can't seem to halt his mind from whirring along with the steady, white noise of the ship's engines: At times he has found the noise comforting, or unnoticeable, but currently its intrusive, holding pride of place in his consciousness as he tries to shut down his brain for long enough to drift off. Has it gotten louder?

Hannibal is in the kitchen, which is two doors down from this dormitory, only a small toilet cubicle between that room and this. Will's own assigned bunk is actually in a different set of quarters two floors down and half a ship closer to the engine room. It is noisier there. So he sleeps on the mattress of a dead crew-mate and listens to Hannibal cutting meat.

Thunk, he hears the cleaver hit the wooden chopping board, then the quieter *snick, snick* of Hannibal making several more precise cuts.

Thunk, again, and Will closes his eyes, watches Hannibal in his mind: He sees the massive kitchen, designed to feed mass produced slop to a mess hall full of crew men, and sloppier mess to the inmates. The counters are gleaming silver, shining off the warm sunlight-like light from above, and the walls are silver too. Everything glows, glints in the light; it catches on the giant pots that hang from the racks on the walls. Hannibal stands centre at one of the long counters, preparing… steak? Will thinks it looks -- sounds -- like steak.

Thunk, and the ships engines are much quieter now. Will watches for a few more moments, watches in his mind's eye the way Hannibal prepares the meat: The deliberate, precise movements of his hands. But the glow of the room is too much. He can still hear the *thunk, snick-snick* but can't see much through the bright light clouding the room. The dead crew members bunk feels soft, now, and Will thinks he may be drifting off.

Thunk, snick-snick, the sound comes again, but Will doesn't pay it much mind. He doesn't pay anything much mind. He is warm, and the pillow is soft.

Thunk, snick-snick, against… wood. Only, it doesn't sound like wood. Maybe Hannibal is cutting the meat against the bare counter, because that noise is the sound of a knife against metal. Will hears it again, and this time, it isn't a knife.

Thunk, snick-snick.

It is coming closer, heavy step down the broad corridor, dragging razor sharp claws down the walls.

Thunk, snick-snick.

Will can still hear the sound of the engines whirring, but it is being drowned out by the approach of the thing that's making the noises. That, and the screams. The screams are distant, from the lower decks, Will thinks. The bed is no longer soft, he is no longer warm.

Thunk, snick-, this time drowned out by the ship's sirens, howling in Will's ears, blocking out everything except the screaming and the inhuman noises the creature makes now and again.

Snick-snick-snick. It is just outside the door, now, and Will can hear, *can feel* the way its scythe-like claws rip through the flesh of one of the crew -- perhaps the one who slept in this bed. The alien makes disgusting noises with its claws and its mouth as it messily devours its banquet. The sirens are still blaring, the screams louder.

Will opens his eyes, sweating and panting, and the ceiling above him is splattered in fresh blood that falls in little droplets down onto his face and body. On the bunk below him, someone is screaming, and the creature is tearing into him: More blood flies up, covers Will and the ceiling. He can hear the inhuman noises, the slurping on the bloody flesh and the crunch of bone.

Will blinks, and it is all gone save for the steady hum of the ships engines. He gasps in fast, unsteady breaths, and touches his face frantically. His fingers come away clean and blood free. The ceiling is filtering nothing but soft, evening light.

*

Will has never been inside the officer's quarters before. They're not lavish, by any means, but they are comfortable. There is a dining and seating area, with a low table and two couch-like chairs, and a large bed towards the back end of the room, divided off by a translucent screen. The walls are rich, navy blue and the carpet a caramel creme. There are light fittings on the wall, unlike the integrated "natural" light of the rest of the ship, and Hannibal has dimmed them down, giving the room an antique twenty-first century feel.

"I thought it might be more pleasant to eat here," Hannibal says, laying out place settings on the small table in the living area. "Not so many empty seats as in the mess hall. Perhaps less morbid."

Taking a seat and sinking down into the soft cushions, Will grimaces a little at the turn of phrase. Varying degrees of morbid, he thinks, his tone sarcastic in his own mind. On a scale of one to ten, this is perhaps a three. He doesn't say anything.

"Wine?" asks Hannibal, holding the bottle temptingly above the glass closer to Will, who is not sure wine was part of the ship's inventory when they took off. He suspects Hannibal brought his own supply along. He nods, and watches the plum-red liquid waterfall into the glass.

He's not actually sure he wants to drink wine. It always makes him tired, and he's certainly slept enough for one day.

Hannibal is still fussing around with table settings and the food. There's a direct beam from the kitchen to the officers quarters set up in the corner, presumably so the higher ranks don't ever have to leave the comfort of their rooms on their off-hours, and once Hannibal is satisfied with the dining ambiance, he pulls out two small, deep bowls and places one before Will before taking a seat himself.

The bowl is filled with a perfectly clear, jewel-coloured consommé. It looks delicious, and Will wants to taste it, but he's so comfortable in the slightly reclined, padded chair that he just finds himself staring at the glimmering soup for a moment. In reality, it just has a slight reddish hue, but as Will stares into its depths, the soup seems to become darker and darker until it is a swirling bowl of richly coloured, warm blood.

"Will?"

He blinks, registering Hannibal's voice, but doesn't move until it comes another time: "Will."

"Hm?" Looking up, he makes brief, startled eye contact with the man on the other side of the table, then immediately looks down at the table again, reaching for the soup spoon laid before him, and dipping it into the consommé, which is as light and fresh and clear as it should be. "This is delicious," he tells Hannibal.

"Are you alright, Will?" the other man asks, setting down his own spoon and watching him with concern.

Will laughs, brushing him off. "Fine, I'm fine. Bad, uh, bad nights sleep last night."

Hannibal's eyes narrow: It is clear he doesn't believe him. Nonetheless, they carry on with the meal, and Hannibal doesn't make any further comment on Will's continued distraction until they've polished off the main course and moved to the couch that lines the far wall to finish off the wine.

Will can still taste the perfect, juicy cuts of steak on his lips, feel the wild mushrooms on his tongue, the rich, rosemary hinted reduced wine sauce trickling its way down his throat. The meal, he thinks, has done him somewhat good. He is no longer hearing the sounds of alien teeth tearing into flesh, no longer feeling the drip of blood on his skin.

Feeling Hannibal's eyes on him, Will lifts the glass of wine to his lips, drinking deeply. They are both reclining on the couch, although Hannibal seems to maintain his posture as he does so, whereas Will thinks he must look like an under-stuffed cushion that's been here too long with the way he's melted his whole body into the shape of the sofa.

"You are still distracted," Hannibal comments. Will shrugs.

"I don't think I'll ever have peace of mind while we're on this ship," he says. "This is better. Right now."

Twisting to face him, Hannibal reaches out a hand, touching Will's shoulder. He stiffens for a moment under the touch, but doesn't flinch away. After a moment, he relaxes: Hannibal still has his hand in place, just a firm, grounding touch, and Will lets out a deep breath he didn't know he was holding - doesn't know how long he's been holding it.

"How can we-" Will hears sudden unsteadiness in his own voice, a tremor that wasn't there a moment ago. "… have dinner, and drink wine, and sit on the nice couch and act like everything is-"

"What else should we do?" Hannibal asks, cutting him off. "It could be a long time before we get rescued - and Will, I assure you, we will get rescued - but how will we stay sane if we do not continue on as though we are sane?"

Will almost laughs out loud at that. This is sane for Hannibal, he supposes. This is surreal for him.

"We don't even know what happened!" he snaps, a touch of anger in his still shaky voice. "For all we know, whoever - whatever - did this to the crew is still on board!"

Hannibal shakes his head calmly. "Between us," he reasons, "we have searched and scanned the whole ship."

"I know," Will says, squeezing his eyes tightly shut as they start to itch with tiredness and strain. As he takes a deep breath, he feels Hannibal lean back in the chair, hand still on his shoulder snaking around his neck and up into his hair so that he is caressing Will almost as one would a child. It's immensely comforting, Will finds, but his brain still whirs on the unknowns of their predicament. "But it's just-- *Someone is playing games with us*."

Hannibal cuts him off with a shushing sound. "No, Will," he says. "I promise you, it is just you and me here."

*

The ceiling is filtering nothing but deep, moon-tinted night. Will gasps in fast, unsteady breaths and touches his face frantically. His fingers come away coated in sticky, dark blood.

There are stomach churning sounds coming from the bed beneath him. He is terrified to look over the edge of the bunk and see what is making them, but even as he lies stock still, hardly breathing, he knows he has to look, he has to see. Moving as slowly and silently as he is able, Will rolls his body, listening carefully for his own breaths or the squeak of the bed, rustle of blankets: Anything that might alert the monster to his presence. Holding a shallow breath tight in his throat, he peeks over the edge of the mattress.

He expects to see mottled skin, scales, huge tusk-like fangs or diamond cut talons: Something alien, something *wrong*.

Beneath him, shovelling a bleeding mess of internal organs from a still twitching, writhing crew member into his blood soaked mouth, is Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Will no longer cares if he is heard or seen. Panic overcomes his body, and he throws himself over the edge of the bed, scrabbling not to even brush Hobbs in his escape: He just has to run. He is out the door, certain he's being followed. There is no way he wasn't noticed, even as absorbed as Hobbs was in his meal. All Will can hear is the frantic rasp of his own breaths as he runs down the corridor, directionless.

He is unsteady, stumbling as he runs, tripping on things that aren't there as he veers away from the horrors that surround him. Hobbs has wrought a fetid path down the ship: Blood is smeared down the walls in deliberate two-fingered lines. It reminds Will of a path left in a maze, a unrolling ball of string. Here and there, slumped against the walls with eyes still open, unseeing, are other path-markers. All are hollow, empty shells of muscle, bone and skin. All the functional parts are gone from them; discarded, half chewed in little puddles on the silver floor.

Will cannot hear Hobbs footsteps behind him, still can't hear anything but himself. Surrounded by Hobbs' leftovers, Will is very cognizant of his own life functions. His breath, his heartbeat, the presence of his stomach - which is turning. Turning and, disarmingly, growling. Will doesn't think he should ever be hungry again.

But he is. Once he is conscious of the fact, it becomes all consuming. As sickened as he is, still stumbling up the halls of the ship and trying to avoid slipping in the blood on the floor or tripping over a particularly wayward corpse, Will becomes very aware of the gnawing in his stomach. When was the last time he ate? Breakfast. Breakfast with Hannibal. When was that? When is it now?

It must be days since he last ate, he's sure of that by how truly empty he is.

He turns a corner, panting in a ragged gasp as he props himself against the wall and pauses. He doesn't want to stop. He wants to run forever. But what he sees startles him to a halt. Not the carnage, though there is plenty of that, sure. His fingers try to grip the smooth wall, his knuckles whitening. He's in front of the rec room door. His traitorous feet have run him here, of all places.

Glancing behind him, up the long corridor, Will sees no sign of Hobbs. Legs shaking, he walks forward. *Swoosh*, the doors open - a corpse that was leaning propped up against them falls to the side, slumped on the floor. Disgusted and starving, Will steps over it, steps into the rec room.

With the hope there might be some food still lying on one of the tables in here, Will finds a veritable feast laid out before him, untouched. With a sigh of relief, he drops to his knees, crawls over to the nearest corpse, someone he vaguely recognises as a navigation officer, and rips their uniform away. With trembling fingers, he digs his hands into the flesh of their

stomach, pulling them apart with surprising ease. Mouth watering, he plucks out an organ with both hands, and takes a bite, tearing into the juicy meat.

Satisfaction flows through his body. The hunger is still present, but nothing more than an insistent ache now, rather than an all-consuming craving. Slipping into something of a trance, Will feasts, mindful not to mess nor grace, just to the indulgent ambrosia of the blood spilling down his throat, relishing the way the meat feels as he chews.

Will wakes slowly, without knowledge of where the dream ends and reality returns. He is aware of the warm slide of blood falling thickly through his fingers, until he isn't. He is warm and full and chewing on a particularly tough piece of liver, until he is cold and shaking and alone, crouched on the floor. The room is not full of dismantled, dismembered bodies, just empty chairs, tables. Will is slumped against one such chair, his hands still outstretched to where he imagines the stomach he had his fingers buried in moments ago should be. He doesn't move until the trembling in his body overcomes in and he drops from his semi-upright position to lie, foetus-like on the carpeted floor.

The far wall is gleaming metal, and Will can see his reflection. Garret Jacob Hobb's dead eyes stare back at him from his own sockets. He closes them. He can't stay here. The carpet he lies on is soaked in blood, he is lying in it. He is surrounded by lifeless crewmen who watch him with unseeing eyes. With effort, he pushes himself up and half-crawls, half-drags himself back out into the corridor.

There is nowhere to go -- he can't return to bed, in case he returns to dreams also.

When the overhead lights ease their way into something like dawn, Hannibal Lecter finds Will Graham curled up on himself outside the door to his quarters.

*

Will never thought he'd miss the artificial voice of the ship's computer. He always thought she sounded like the aural equivalence of one of those all-too-lifelike robots that they get to do the jobs real people won't. (They had a few of those things working as prison guards here on the ship: Eerily silent, hyper-vigilant, expressionless faces. Probably perfect for the job, although Will always thought they were lacking in the 'I' part of A.I.) She spoke crisply, clean cut and elegant. All her intonations were in the correct parts of her sentences. And she made shivers run up Will's spine.

The computer is all too silent now, requiring Will to manually input any commands on a dusty datapad he dragged out of storage and hooked up to the console. It's a somewhat laborious exercise, made no easier by the way his eyelids keep drooping with exhaustion - and what he's coming up with isn't making anything seem at all better. He thought all these high security computers came with backups, and backups of the backups: But he just can't find a scrap of the missing data. He wishes he could just *ask* the computer where she kept everything, and get a brusque, simple response. But it's like she's in a coma, wholly unresponsive and with no signs of pursuing life of any sort beyond the basic heartbeat and reflex functions.

The distress beacon, on that note, blips regularly from the next console over. Will watches it without expectation from the corner of his eye - there's nothing on the radar, not even anything that can help him pinpoint where they are. He wishes he'd attended a pre-flight emergency navigation course.

Not that it will necessarily matter, he reasons, as he watches the autopilot screen glitch again for the third or fourth time since he came into the console room a couple of hours ago. He gnaws at the inside of his cheek in concern as he waits for the lag to correct itself as it did before, and sure enough, the ship is almost immediately piloting itself as smooth as ever again.

The lags. The lags are concerning for several reasons. They're brief, so far: Will wouldn't have noticed them at all if he hadn't chosen to spend this entire morning at the main console. However, should the autopilot choose to fail in its functions for more than the second or two it has thus far, the major problems would quickly make themselves known, i.e., Planets. Asteroids. Meteors. Will knows that without the autopilot, even if he managed to engage the manual steering, there would be no way to avoid them if they happened to drift into their path, which the ship eventually would. Furthermore, the autopilot and distress beacon are intrinsically linked in the ships basic programming, therefore, should one drop out, the other would also stop functioning entirely.

Will wonders if its only a matter of time until they're flying silent, blind, and completely undetectable. It is with a jolt of relief, then, that he eventually hears the door sigh open behind him. Leaning his head back on the navigation chair, he catches a whiff of rich, strong coffee waft into the room.

"Thanks," he says, as Hannibal wanders over and places the mug on an empty part of the console.

"I hope your morning is improving?" Sitting down in the officer's chair next to Will's, Hannibal takes a demure sip of his own black coffee.

Will makes a coughing noise, almost a laugh. "Uh, hardly," he replies, and waves a hand at the computer screen. "No better, that's for sure. At least, uh, until you - and the coffee - showed up."

"Any assistance we can be," Hannibal replies with a smile. "I'm afraid I never learnt much about the technical elements of flying a ship, so I can't be of much use in here."

Taking a long drink from his mug, Will considers telling Hannibal about their situation with the autopilot. It would only be fair, wouldn't it? It isn't as though Hannibal has kept anything from him. Nevertheless, it's not like it will make much difference either way.

"You have no idea how much I needed this," he says instead, gesturing to the cup and finishing his drink with a deep inhale, as if he can breath in the caffeine.

"Well," Hannibal says, "I may not be good with navigational computers, but I am reasonably competent regarding the one in your head. And it does not take much to extrapolate that you had an unpleasant night."

Will looks down at his hands, feeling heavy headed with exhaustion and shame. "Sorry, again."

"You need not apologise, Will, for what you do in your sleep. I am assuming you were sleepwalking, yes?"

"Yes. I was, but..." He taps his fingers repeatedly on the side of the mug, eyeing the last swirling dregs of coffee. "I didn't sleep walk to your room. I couldn't go back to my own. I wasn't sure where to go."

Hannibal twists in the chair he's sitting on, spinning so he is facing Will full bodily. "Aren't we the only two people on this ship?" he says gently. "And aren't we friends? If we do not have time for one another, we are severely mismanaging our hectic schedules."

Will huffs out a laugh at that, feels his face smile, properly. "True."

"Really though, Will. Should you find yourself unable to return to your own quarters - or whatever quarters you are choosing to sleep in - I promise you, I have commandeered some rather comfortable ones for myself, and I do not mind being woken in the night."

"… Thanks," Will says after a time. What he means is: Although he's in possibly the most uniquely unlucky situation possible, he's glad he was thrown into it with Dr. Lecter.

*

Sitting upright in a particularly uncomfortable chair in what was an office of sorts, Will tries not to drift off, even as his chin bumps against his shoulder and his grip on his half empty mug of instant coffee begins to loosen. He has a novel pulled up on the datapad on his lap, but the words started to blur together a while ago.

Thinking back to Hannibal's offer from the other morning, Will wonders if he should find him. He doesn't want to nod off where he sits for another night, drifting in and out of consciousness, never quite slipping into full-blown nightmare, but never quite grounded in reality either. He knows at some point tonight, he'll get up and wander the ship in a half-asleep stupor. He knows he'll justify it as an attempt to stay awake, delay the sleep and the terror that sleep brings. He knows that in his numb wanderings, he will hover outside of Hannibal's quarters, perhaps for hours. Linger there, pacing silently the dimly-lit hallway, feet cold on the floor. Several times he will raise his hand, as if to knock. But in the end, he wont.

In the end, he'll slink away, find a bed in a cabin far enough from Hannibal's for plausible deniability, and pretend to have slept. Lie on the bed with his eyes closed for long enough to convince himself he *has slept*.

Suddenly, the handle of the mug slips from his hand and smashes to pieces on the floor. Coffee spills everywhere. Will jerks, coming out of his dozy rest, his heart pounding. He pulls himself up from where he's slouched, slumped down in the chair, and blinks rapidly. His fingers are unsteady as he turns off the dimmed down display on his datapad and puts it on the desk.

He really needs to sleep.

Standing up, he looks hazily around the room for something to mop up the coffee with. There's a wash-room connected to the office, so he ducks inside and plucks a roll of toilet paper from a hook on the wall. Back in the office, he carefully picks the ceramic shards up off the floor, drops them in a trash unit and tears off long pieces of paper, dropping them on the spilled liquid and watching the white paper turn beige as the coffee seeps in.

He's too tired to get on his knees again and finish cleaning up. He doesn't hear the door open.

"Let me," Hannibal says, and Will turns his head slowly - although he hadn't expected him, thought he retired to bed hours ago, Will doesn't have it in him to be alarmed again tonight.

"Oh..." he murmurs as Hannibal drops down to his knees, picking up the roll of toilet paper himself and laying more out on the ground. He's wearing a dressing gown over silken nightclothes. Will gets down as well, starts mopping up. The toilet paper is cold and mushy under his finger tips. He drops a wad of it in the trash. "No, I'll- I woke you."

"I was reading," Hannibal says. "And only up the hall."

Will hadn't realised how close to Hannibal's quarters the office he'd chosen to spend the night in was until now. He wonders if its telling. Hannibal brushes his hands out of the way and finishes cleaning up, standing again. He looks down at Will.

"You told me you've been sleeping," he says, voice more concerned than judging, which Will appreciates.

He shrugs. "I have. A bit." Will feels his stomach growl, suddenly, and realises he hasn't eaten since dinner with Hannibal earlier that evening, many hours ago. He flashes back to his nightmare, and shivers, wanting to quell the feeling. He doesn't want to eat, knows anything he puts in his mouth right now will taste like blood and flesh. He wants to sleep away the gnawing, empty feeling. "Can, can I...?"

"Of course," Hannibal says, and helps Will to his feet. His hand doesn't leave Will's elbow as he guides him down the hall.

*

It takes Will a while to drift off, as if his body is no longer able to initiate sleep as a natural event. But, he is warm and comfortable as he lies there, head resting on a soft pillow, quite unlike the ones in the crewmen's bunks. The blankets are pulled up as tight around his shoulders as they can be, heavy and smelling like fabric softener and Hannibal, who reclines on the far side of the large bed. There is a little space between them, but Will can still feel the other man shift slightly here and there, can hear him breath.

For once, he feels surrounded by life rather than death as he drifts away from consciousness. He watches Hannibal through his heavy lidded eyes before he commits to closing them, and sees Hannibal's ashen, ember tinted eyes watching back.

Will has never really bought into this sort of stuff, but with Hannibal's gaze warming him as he lies in his cosy bed, Will feels watched over by something angelic, or otherwise ethereal. It is in solace, then, that Will finally sleeps, long and dreamless, waking only to the artificial midday light that shines down from the ceiling above, many hours later. Hannibal is lying beside him on the bed when he wakes, smiling down at him as his eyes flutter open, rested.

Chapter 3

Will looks down at the plate in front of him, and is viscerally surprised by the joy that suddenly jolts through his body. Hannibal made *pancakes*.

"Galette bretonne," Hannibal says, as if reading Will's mind. There's an undercurrent to his tone that implies an affectionately supercilious '*Americans*', as well. "With lemon and sugar."

Will's heart thumps in his chest, but for the first time in weeks, not unpleasantly. Hannibal has a hand lingering on his shoulder again, apparently waiting for him to start eating. Where Hannibal's touch felt grounding before, it now feels like soft sheets and warmth and rest. Ignoring the knife set out, Will picks up his fork and begin to eat, hungrily. The galette is perfect, just the right measure of bitter and sweet, and Hannibal looks pleased with Will's reaction. He gives his shoulder a quick squeeze before moving over to the other side of the table and pulling out a paperback book with a plain blue cover.

"You're not having any?" Will asks around a mouthful of the buckwheat pancake. Hannibal smiles, eyes on the book.

"I already ate," he replies. "At breakfast time, that is. You rather overslept."

There isn't a clock anywhere this side of Hannibal's quarters, however Will does note that, -- now that he thinks about it -- the light filtering down from the ceiling does look more like the ship's idea of early afternoon than morning. He grins around his breakfast, reaching for the pot of coffee Hannibal has placed in the centre of the table.

"I had the best nights sleep I've had since I came onto this ship," Will admits, somewhat shyly. Hannibal looks up from his book and catches his eye at that. The truth that Will doesn't say is that he's not sure he's ever slept as well as he did with Hannibal beside him. That he's not sure he'll ever be able to sleep again without his presence.

"I'm glad," Hannibal says, amused. "Although I must request one thing of you."

Don't make a habit of it, Will's brain helpfully supplies. The truth is, even as deeply as he slept last night, Will knows he can't make a particularly pleasant bed companion: Constantly shifting and twitching and prone to night sweats.

But Hannibal continues: "I must ask that you try to come to bed *with* me tonight. I am certain we will both sleep better and rise at a more sensible hour if we do not have an interrupted night."

"Uh, yeah, sure," Will says, trying not to focus on the turn of phrase 'with me'. At the same hour, Hannibal had meant, he tells himself. Not… not *with him*. Will feels his face heating up, and from the rise of Hannibal's eyebrow across the table, he knows he has flushed bright red. '*Is that what I want?*' he asks himself, and is surprisingly unsurprised to find that the answer is yes. "Yeah," he stammers out again, trying for casual, relaxed. Missing by a mile.

Hannibal smirks. "Your galette is getting cold," he points out, so Will distracts himself by eating quickly, his face still hot.

They sit at that table for a long time. Will finishes his breakfast, and moves onto slowly sipping at his coffee; Hannibal seems absorbed in his book, and only gets up to clear away Will's plate when he notices he's finished, and refill the coffee pot for both of them. It is pleasant, Will decides. The light overhead is giving off the warm glow of high-noon, and in its incandescent glow it almost feels warm, despite the consistently low temperature of the ship as a whole. Will is content.

The ship is quiet, the engine sounding distant and far off this morning. Hannibal has some soft classical music playing, and aside from that, the only noise is the occasional rustle of pages being turned. Will sits back in his chair and closes his eyes.

Suddenly, there is a loud noise, like something heavy crashing onto metal. Will sits up straight.

"What was that?" he asks.

Hannibal glances up from his book. "Pardon?"

"That noise," Will says, getting to his feet. The sound had definitely come from the lower decks, possibly the prisoner bay or the engine room. Neither of those options is good.

"What noise?" Hannibal asks, concerned. He marks the page in his book, standing up to follow Will, who's now moving towards the cabin door.

"Something falling," Will insists. "Or being knocked over, loudly. You must have heard it. It came from down below."

Shaking his head, Hannibal says; "I heard nothing," but follows Will out into the corridor and towards the elevator. As he hurries along the deck, Will hears it again, another loud crash, followed by a series of short banging noises.

"There!" Will shouts to Hannibal, who is a few feet behind him, hurrying to keep up. "You heard that, right?"

"Will, I do not hear anything." His hand comes out to grab Will's wrist, stopping him in his tracks. The banging noises are coming nearly constantly now, definitely from the prisoner deck. Will tries to pull his hand free, but Hannibal only clenches his grip tighter. "*Will!*"

"SOMEONE IS DOWN THERE!" Will shouts. Hannibal blinks in the face of the sudden panic in Will's voice -- it's the closest he's come to flinching. Will can hear the noises downstairs clearer now. Things are being knocked over, crashing to the floor. He hears screams, heavy footsteps running on the metal floors.

"We shall go down to investigate," Hannibal eventually says, not letting go of Will's arm. Will glares at him.

"You must hear them," he snaps, but this time when he tries to move towards the elevator, Hannibal doesn't stop him. He follows him, not letting go. "There, there is a woman screaming! We have to hurry!"

For Will, the elevator takes a painfully long time to open, the doors sliding open as usual in their calm way. He steps inside and Hannibal joins him, finally relinquishing his grip on Will's wrist. Inside the elevator, the noises coming from downstairs come a degree clearer, the screams louder, more vocalised, but they're not words. Just mindless, hysterical sounds.

Slowly, the elevator descends. Hannibal is keeping a close eye on Will, clearly ready to reach out and grab him the moment he makes a sudden move. There is deep worry in his eyes, but his features stay expressionlessly calm. Finally, they reach the prisoner deck, and the doors slide open.

The walls of the prisoner's deck are gunmetal grey, the lights overhead not set to shift with the time of day like the ones upstairs. The fluorescent strips coldly light the walls and floors, glinting on sharp corners. Will steps outside the elevator, Hannibal on his heel behind him. The screams are clear down here, and Will hears another voice along with them. It is speaking calmly, but the words are indistinguishable through the heavy metal door that separates the cell block from this small processing room. Beside the door stand two of the A.I. guards, powered down. Their glass eyes are half lidded and blank.

Will approaches the door. With the ship powered down, the security systems are null and void; the only lock on this door the heavy iron bolt. They had discovered this the last time they searched his deck, weeks ago. Will reaches out to unlock the door, pausing before pushing it open to listen carefully for what awaits them.

He still hears someone running, their heavy boots sometimes tripping. Things clatter against the floor as they are knocked aside. The screams are nigh constant, mostly wordless; occasionally begging for help. The other voice remains level, speaking in tones that would sound soothing if they did not belong to what Will is certain is a hunter stalking his prey.

He glances at Hannibal over his shoulder, who shakes his head. He still doesn't hear anything. Terrified, Will pushes the door wide open. The cells stretch out in darkness before them, tinted glass and heavy iron.

The noises stop as soon as the door is open. The cells are dead silent.

"I hear nothing," Hannibal says in a murmur.

Will lets out a trembling breath. "Me neither. They… they've stopped." Plucking a torch from the A.I. guard's belt, Will steps shakily into the cells, shining the light down in every direction. With Hannibal at his side, he searches every corner of the whole deck, and finds no one. Nothing has been disturbed.

In the darkness, Hannibal's voice is an even, calming presence. "We should return upstairs," he says.

"Yeah," Will says, but suddenly find his legs wont support his weight, and drops to his knees, trembling all over. "What is *wrong with me*?" he mumbles.

"You were experiencing another episode," says Hannibal gently. He doesn't kneel with Will, but does reach out to run a hand through his hair like one might a child or a pet. Will's eyes flicker closed and he leans into the touch, resting his head against Hannibal's thigh. "You were reliving your experiences with Garrett Jacob Hobbs again, most likely."

"It didn't sound like Hobbs," Will says. But doesn't disagree.

"Nonetheless, the episode must have stemmed from the same place in your psyche, the same base fears."

Will nods, his cheek brushing against the smooth material of Hannibal's trousers. The cell block is freezing cold, the metal of the floor icy against Will's legs, even through his pants.

"Can you stand?" Hannibal asks. Will nods again.

"I think so."

Hannibal carefully helps Will to his feet, watchful of him to ensure he does not collapse. Slowly, carefully, they make their way out of the darkness of the cell block, into the elevator and back into the warm afternoon light of the crewman's decks upstairs.

*

Dinner that evening is not Hannibal's usual affair. Will sits at the bench in the expansive kitchen and watches him cook for the first time. It is with care and deliberation that he creates the hearty chicken soup, but there is very little of his typical extravagance to the round bowl that is eventually placed in front of Will.

"I thought we required comfort food," Hannibal says with a warm smile, taking a seat next to Will at the kitchen counter. There is a plate of home-made bread also set next to them, lavished with butter. Will, who has been watching, but with a distracted gaze, his thoughts elsewhere, grins back.

The meal is definitely that: Comforting. The soup takes the lingering chill from Will's bones, and the bread is delicious and filling, settling heavy and cushioning into his stomach. Nonetheless, Will can't quite pull himself out of memories, still shivering a little and twitching at every loud clink of Hannibal's spoon against the sides of his bowl.

It is with concern that Hannibal watches him, not the warm affectionate gaze from earlier that day.

"Do not linger on it," he tells Will eventually. "Do not let it control you."

Sighing around a spoonful of soup, Will shakes his head. "I need to get off this ship," he replies, voice tinged with desperation. He doesn't really care where else he would be -- Earth; one of the huge, expansive space stations with open gardens protected from space by a

glittering bio-sphere, the sort he'd grown up on; a terraformed planet covered in burnt shrub-land and little else. Anything would be fine. Anything but this ship.

Hannibal sets aside his mostly empty bowl, takes Will's from his hands and places it on the kitchen bench. Empty, Will's hands hover in the air until he slowly lowers them to his knees. Hannibal covers them with his own.

"It is getting late," he murmurs. "Shall we go to bed?"

Will closes his eyes, sighs. He almost laughs at himself, remembering how his cheeks had flushed at the thought of bed and Hannibal only a small number of hours ago. Now, however, his mind keeps replaying screams in his head, broken and scratchy like they are being played on an old vinyl record.

"Will, shall we go to bed?" Hannibal asks again. Will nods his acquiescence. He does, indeed, want to sleep. Hannibal smiles, and he finds it in him to smile back. He lets Hannibal lead him out of the kitchen and down the hall to Hannibal's comfortable quarters.

Inside, he stands awkwardly while Hannibal dims the lights and fusses around a little bit, hanging up his jacket, brushing his teeth. The screams are still echoing in Will's ears in ringing echoes. He doesn't think he can sleep. Maybe he shouldn't try. He should find somewhere on the ship to read, somewhere bright and close to the engines, where he'll stay awake.

Then, Hannibal is in front of him again. Will catches his eyes briefly before flicking his gaze away. He's about to say something about not being tired, about going somewhere else, about how he'll find Hannibal in the morning.

But before he can say anything, Hannibal's hands come up to his face, one brushing his cheek, the other over the nape of his neck, in his hair. Will's eyes flutter closed and suddenly Hannibal's lips are over his, kissing him.

The screams stop immediately, everything goes quiet except for the sound of Hannibal's breath, except for the noises of him slowly removing his clothes, zippers being undone and fabric falling in heavy piles on the floor. No sounds except the bed sighing as Hannibal pushes Will back onto it.

There are no screams, there are no phantom noises.

If Will thought he slept well last night, it was nothing to how well he sleeps this time.

*

In the following weeks, Will comes to almost call the ship home. If he stays within the little corner of the deck made up of Hannibal's quarters (and his, now, he realises), the kitchens and the mess hall, it almost seems cosy, and he can convince himself that its not so far off from some of the space stations he has lived on.

He all but forgets the dark cell blocks that line the floors beneath them, and hears nothing crashing from below, nor nothing scraping at the walls. As far as he knows, he sees nor hears nothing unreal.

Here, now, he is lying on the end of their bed, a datapad in hand. There is little else to do on this ship but read, sleep and eat, and now, have sex with Hannibal. Will finds that he's not really complaining, with the recent addition of the most enjoyable activity.

At the moment, Hannibal is probably off in the kitchens; Will can hear him moving about. He rubs his eyes. He's been staring at the words on the screen of the datapad for a long time now. The book isn't bad, exactly, but its hardly engaging either, and the backlit screen is starting to give Will a headache. With a yawn, he rolls off the bed and pulls on a sweater.

Hannibal apparently hears the door of the quarters slide open, and calls out something slightly teasing to Will about the fact that he's been in bed all day.

"I'm heading up to the med-bay," he says, popping his head into the kitchens. Hannibal is, predictably, at one of the gleaming counters, apparently making pasta from scratch. There is a meaty sauce simmering on the stove top. Hannibal glances up with a querying expression. "Headache," Will clarifies.

Hannibal smiles and nods, going back to rolling out the pasta dough.

The trip to the med-bay is quiet and empty, but the walk is actually quite relaxing, Will finds, and his headache is actually already fading by the time he reaches his destination. Nonetheless, he steps through the sliding door and looks around, trying to work out where the painkillers are kept. He hasn't been in here since he woke up, he realises -- even when they were searching the ship, Hannibal did this room himself while Will checked the A.I. core next door. The hatch to his cryo pod is still ajar, he realises, and wanders over to close it.

Just as he's about to push it shut, through, his eye catches on a little display on the inside of the hatch. It's just a tiny screen, about the size of an I.D. card, displaying a couple of dates. Will reads them, and realises they're the times he went into cryo and his release. There is a time span of about six months between the two dates, which surprises Will at first, but does actually sound about right when he thinks about it. He only spent a few weeks aboard the ship during its scheduled trip, and the journey out to their distant quadrant was over a half-year long.

Suddenly curious, Will looks over the wall, trying to find the hatch with Hannibal's name on it. He knows he's not really going to learn anything new… Hannibal went into cryo only a few weeks after he did, he knows that. Nonetheless, Will wants to see the dates, see if he can glean any sort of significant unlikely information from them.

Soon, he spots the hatch he's looking for, marked with H. Lecter. He tugs it open, not really expecting any sort of revelation.

The display is blank. Not powered down, the time and date fields are still showing up. Just, blank. Unused.

Will's brows draw together as he tries to rationalise this. Perhaps Hannibal cleared his cryo pod's log when he got out? Will looks at the display, but there's no interactive controls. The only way to clear it would have been from the computer, and those were all non-functional by the time Hannibal emerged from stasis.

He's about to dismiss the display as an odd malfunction, when suddenly Will someone scream. He shoots to his feet, and listens carefully. The screams continue, accompanied by the same running and crashing noises as the last time Will heard it. Again, it's coming from the prisoner decks, but even though he's several floors up, Will can hear everything clearly this time, as he did when he was right outside the door.

He can hear the calm voice again, but this time he recognises who it belongs to, and his blood suddenly turns cold in his veins. He gasps in a terrified breath, squeezes his eyes shut and raises his hands to his ears, trying to block out the screams of the woman being murdered.

When he opens his eyes, there are bodies lying discarded against the walls of the med-bay, disembowelled and eyes unseeing. Will tries to breath, but there's something blocking his throat; every breath is painful and ragged. He wants to scream, scream with the women on the prisoner deck. But once again he's hungry, so hungry. His stomach is rumbling, empty and churning. He coughs around the blockage in his throat, trying to breath. Something is interrupting his airway, and he coughs violently, bracing himself against the bed in the centre of the med-bay.

The blockage dislodges itself, and Will hacks it up, nearly retching with the force of ejecting it from his body.

What lands on the crisp white sheets of the bed before him is undoubtedly a piece of human flesh.

Shaking, hungry, his ears ringing with screams and surrounded by an audience of corpses, Will looks into the mirror on the far wall.

Where his own eyes should be, he sees Hannibal's staring back at him.

Will hears an echo of his own voice over the screams:

"*Someone is playing games with us*."

"*No Will, I promise you, it is just you and me here.*"

Chapter 4

Dazed, Will wanders back from the med-bay towards the kitchens. He can no longer hear the screaming and crashing, and there are no bloodied corpses lining the walls, but still Will trembles with the memory of both. Neither were real, he reminds himself that. Just, just his over-perceptive brain creating illusions.

Illusions though they were, he knows the facts are real. He knows that some part of his brain understood what happened on this ship long before he did, supplied him images, estimations of events. His feet are carrying him towards the kitchen, towards Hannibal almost against his will. He mostly just wants to slump against the wall, slide down and -- and just, *stop*. Not acknowledge this, not acknowledge anything. Become one of the lifeless, blank staring corpses marking Hannibal's path through the ship.

He walks slowly, but eventually, unhappily, arrives outside the kitchen. The door opens for him.

Hannibal is not inside. The pasta has been cut into thin strips and piled in a shining metal bowl, and the sauce is still simmering on a very low heat. Will's heart rate speeds up, pounding uncomfortably in his chest. He frantically looks around, wondering where Hannibal is. Then he hears, from a few doors down, the shower turn on. He heaves out a sigh of relief. Hannibal isn't far, but he's occupied.

Still in a fog of shock, Will finds himself wandering over to look into the pan on the stove. It looks like a bolognese and smells delicious; of onion, olive oil, basil and minced meat.

Minced meat. Will feels bile rise up in his throat, and stumbles back from the stove.

Then, slowly, morbid curiosity overcomes him. Full of dread, he takes hesitant steps towards the huge industrial refrigerator at the end of the kitchen. He's never been in there, never had the need. With shaking fingers, he opens the heavy metal door.

He feels a gust of cool air, and looks through the light haze of condensation into the fridge. The walls are lined with racks, full of fresh fruits and vegetables, and jars full of condiments and preserved items. There are whole rows of milk cartons, and Hannibal has apparently prepared a gourmet jelly, that wobbles decoratively on the far wall.

On the middle rack of the shelf, there is a blue tinged naked torso, limbs and head removed for space. It has been cut open from throat to intestines, and clearly had a few organs removed. Hannibal has wrapped the open portion of the body in cling-wrap.

Will thinks of the massive industrial freezer out in the back room of the kitchens. Massive enough to house food for a whole crew of hundreds for a sixth month journey. Massive enough to house a whole crew of hundreds.

Staggering back out of the fridge, Will pushes the door tightly shut again, then runs away, stumbling out of the kitchens and across the hall to the mess hall, into the toilet stalls. He

falls to his knees and vomits, retching painfully for what feels like hours. He tastes acid and blood in his throat.

*

Will finally steps out of the toilet stall, weak and shaking, and makes his way out into the corridor, where he slumps against the wall, waiting for Hannibal to find him. He can still taste bile at the back of his palette, but that’s good, he thinks. Better than tasting anything else on this ship.

He can't decide what he's going to do when Hannibal comes out of their room and finds him. He could avoid it, he figures. Hide. The ship is certainly big enough. Hannibal would eventually find him, though, he knows that. And what then? Would he kill him? Will buries his face in his hands, considering his options. He could act normal, pretend nothing is wrong. Go on eating Hannibal's dinners, sneak away every night and vomit out of repulsion. Kiss him. Feel the way Hannibal's fingers stroke through his hair when they lie in bed together. Taste Hannibal's warm skin.
Everything could stay the same.

Or he could refuse to eat. Wait until he starves or Hannibal destroys him.

Hannibal has already destroyed you, his brain tells him helpfully.

Before he can decide on his course of action, the elevator opens behind him, and Will jumps to his feet, turning around in shock. He had assumed Hannibal was still in their quarters, but apparently not.

"Ah, good, there you are, Will," Hannibal says. He is smiling, eyes twinkling. He looks excited. "I've been looking for you."

Hannibal takes a step towards him. Will takes a step back, then stops himself. He lets Hannibal approach, trying not to look as wary as he feels. "Why?"

"I'll explain on the way, come, we have to go back up to the console room." Hannibal takes Will's hand in his, and briefly leans forward to kiss him. Will lets him. When Hannibal pulls away, he looks concerned. "Are you well, you taste--"

"I threw up," Will says, honestly. "Sorry."

Hannibal blinks, his hand coming out to Will's forehead gently. "You are a bit feverish," he says. "Hmm. Not just a headache, then?" Will shakes his head no. "Well, come. We will walk slowly."

He follows Hannibal back over to the elevator, and they step inside. "I'm sorry you are not feeling very well," Hannibal says to Will, stroking his thumb over the back of the hand that he is still holding comfortingly. "But what I am about to tell you ought to make you feel somewhat better."

Will raises an eyebrow. He's not sure there's anything in the whole universe that has the capacity to make him feel not awful right now.

Yet Hannibal continues, and Will feels a surprising wave of relief wash through him: "Someone has received our distress call. We must go make contact with them."

"Wait, really?" Will's pulse is strumming wildly again, and his brain is buzzing. If they're about to be rescued, then it might be alright. When Hannibal is not around, he can contact their rescuing ship, warn them, and they can restrain Hannibal. Save Will. He will never have to eat another meal on this ship, and Hannibal need not know until its too late.

The elevator reaches the control room, and they step out into the deck, Hannibal rushing forward to the console. The emergency channels crackle to life, and a voice echoes through the other end.

"-- We have received your distress call ---resp--- on these channels --- immediately--"

Will comes up behind Hannibal to lean on one of the dead navigation consoles and watch him contact the other ship, excitement strumming through his body. He almost can't stand still. The large windows at the front of the console room look directly out onto the galaxy before them, and Will sees with surprise that they're drifting alongside a meteor belt. He's used to looking out and just seeing stars, not the mass of rocky debris that dominates the view now.

"This is prisoner transport ship, high security, registration 08674," Hannibal says into the channels. "Do you receive us?"

There is a pause, then the speaker comes to life again. "You are received, 08674, what is the status of your vessel?"

"Computers and navigation down," says Hannibal. "Life support systems operable. Only two crewmen alive."

"And your cargo?" the other ship asks.

"All dead," Hannibal answers.

There is another long pause, as if the crew of the other ship are deliberating. Presently though, someone says: "Acknowledged. We're locked onto your location, will be there in about a week. Do you have supplies to last you that long?"

"Plentiful," Hannibal says, even as Will's heart sinks. He can't avoid eating for a week, not without making Hannibal suspicious. He can maybe avoid it for a few days if he plays up his illness, but not for long...

Nonetheless, they are going to be rescued. Hannibal disconnects from the emergency channel, and turns to Will, smiling brightly. He leans forward, and kisses him on the forehead. Will can't help but smile too, and pulls him into a tight hug, burying his face in Hannibal's neck, drinking in the warm, familiar, now repulsive scent.

*

The fact is, though -- the fact that Will Graham should by now know -- is that if there is luck to be had, it will quickly run out. Usually very quickly, in his case.

Hannibal steps back out of their embrace, smiles at Will and says: "I should go finish dinner."

And Will takes his opportunity and replies: "I'm just going to stay up here for a while longer, I'll be down soon." He watches Hannibal move towards the elevator shaft, ready to contact the other ship again the moment he's gone. Outside the front windows, a large meteor skims just overhead, neatly circumvented by the autopilot.

Hannibal is just reaching out to call the elevator, when Will's luck runs out, and he sees something flicker out of the corner of his eye.

"Wait," he says to Hannibal out of instinct. The other man pauses in his tracks and turns around, while Will looks properly at the display.

The autopilot flickers again.

And then dies. Will stares at the screen for a long moment, willing it to come back online, but nothing happens -- he can only see his own terrified reflection in the empty, black screen. He feels Hannibal come up behind him, looking over his shoulder.

"The autopilot," he breaths, barely able to hear his own voice over the pounding of blood in his ears. Panic swells up within him.

He does, however, hear Hannibal's soft, "Oh," behind him. Both of them raise their gaze to the meteor belt they're flying alongside. Its beautiful, Will thinks, full of rust coloured rocks and fragments of rust coloured rocks, some so small they look like glittering sand.

Without autopilot, it is a death trap.

Sure enough, they barely have time to realise their danger before there is the sound of something crashing through one of the lower bays, and whole ship lurches sickeningly. Without a doubt, Will realises as the lights dim and the siren begins to sound, the hull has been breached. His stomach drops even further. Which means that the elevator doors have been sealed shut to preserve the unaffected decks of the ship.

They are stuck up here, in the control room. He glances at Hannibal, who seems to have just had the same realisation that he has. The meteor will have knocked them off course; so even if they are fortunate enough not to get hit by another on *this deck*, the rescue ship will have lost their lock on them. And -- Will's stomach lurches in fear as he realises – they won't be able to pick it up again since the autopilot and distress beacon ran off the same system.

"It could take them weeks to find us," Hannibal murmurs, his own eyes widening in fear. Its the only time Will has ever seen Hannibal afraid.

"The doors are locked," Will added. "We can't access engineering."

"Or the food supply," Hannibal added.

Will looks at Hannibal, sucks in a breath. His eyes are dark and he's looking up ahead of him, out of the front window, where they are now drifting steadily further from the meteor belt, and steadily towards an expanse of space that seems to be lacking even stars.

The food supply, he thinks, his eyes on Hannibal's mouth.

He's going to get hungry.

“Don't worry, Will,” Hannibal says, bringing a hand out to Will's trembling shoulder, running a thumb comfortingly over the nape of his neck. “We can make it out of this together.

“Trust me.”

END.

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